

The land on which Lake Burien School would eventually be built appears to have originally been homesteaded by "N.M. Bloomfield." N.M. was perhaps the spouse of "N.H. Bloomfield," who owned the parcel "kitty-corner" to the northeast. "W.M" or William Murphy owned 160 acres due east of N.M. Bloomfield's claim, while the name "Chas Barton" appears on the 160-acre parcel to the south, which includes the whole western half of Lake Burien. To the north of the N.M. Bloomfield property lay the Pope and Talbot claim, much of which would eventually become Seahurst Park. (Early map showing Burien's original homesteaders, Wonderful World of Woods and Water, p. 3)

Homesteading apparently was not as successful here as in other parts of the Burien area. The north side of 152nd had been homesteaded but later abandoned. Some of these claims were given up because it was hard to make a living (hence one of the area's early names: "Hardscrabble"). The area's gullies, hard pan and rocky soil were better suited to chickens and hogs than to farming. The land north of 152nd and all through Seahurst was logging land. Later on, around 1910, it was subdivided and sold. (Our Burien, p. 30)

Later, the land on which Lake Burien School would be built appears to have been owned by brothers Fred and Bill Dashley, recently returned from the Alaska Gold Rush. "The Dashley Bros. owned property from 8th S.W. to 22nd on the north side of 152nd, and possibly as far north as 144th." The Dashley brothers were also promoters of the road to Burien, which would become Ambaum Boulevard. (Our Burien, p. 31)

"I remember the very first school in Seahurst," recalled Burien Pioneer Etta Marasch. "It started up in a real estate office in 1913, located on 152nd and 22nd Avenue Southwest. Later on that year it was moved into a tent. In order to get a teacher, the school had to have ten pupils. There were exactly nine children in the area of school age. Therefore, five-year-old little me was drafted to go to school. (By the end of the first year, 13 pupils were enrolled.)

(During rainy weather, children worked under umbrellas in their "tent schoolroom," originally located at the trolley terminus near S.W. 152nd and 22nd S.W. In its second year, the Lake Burien School moved about three-quarters of a mile east to a real estate office at present-day 10th S.W. and S.W. 152nd St.)

"I spent my days playing or sleeping in the back of the room. There was a cat there for me. My oldest sister, Ann, was a pupil in school. The teacher was Miss Snow.

"A year later the new school on the present site of the Burien School was begun. There were two classrooms: a lunch room and playroom downstairs, with two rooms and a principal's office upstairs. In the beginning only one of the upper rooms was put into use. Children walked to this school from Three Tree Point, Seahurst and Hazel Valley. After the First World War, expansion became necessary and in 1926, six rooms were added. In 1928 four more rooms on the north side were added." (Our Burien)

Ginny Anderson recorded it this way: "Again the need for a school was apparent. Angelo Balzarini was in the first class of Burien Grade School. The first classes were held in a real estate office, located where the Post Office is presently situated. Angelo was only

five years old at the time, probably one of the youngest draftees—for he was drafted to make up the 10 pupils necessary to procure a teacher. The school was built shortly after, around 1914, at its present site.” (Undated newspaper article reproduced in Our Burien, p. 29)

In Highline School District Chronicle, former Superintendent Carl Jensen remembers Lake Burien Elementary School this way:

"The last of the 'old' schools, Lake Burien was not started until 1913. The original four-room building was used until a new eight-room school was built in the early 1930s. The original building was used as a community meeting place and boy scout headquarters until it was demolished to make room for an addition to the new school.

"An attempt was made to keep up with the flood of new pupils through several additions. Life Magazine included a picture of Lake Burien with pupils stacked at every open window. In 1976, Lake Burien was finally closed and later sold. The building was finally demolished and a neighborhood park created there." (p. 38)

In 1914 the original Lake Burien Elementary School was completed at the current park location. The school consisted of two classrooms, a lunchroom, playroom and principal's office. The Craftsman-style structure was the only elementary school in the new district. With two single female teachers, the school opened its doors to 13 students spanning eight grades. (From the inscription on the plaque in the park)

Burien School in 1916-17 had two stories. The school had four rooms, two of which were used. According to Burien pioneer Mrs. Ruth Paul Aldrich, Miss Snow taught the lower grades and Miss Emory the upper. Some of the pupils included Cecil Paul, Bessie Bennett, Joanne Sprague, Ruth and Elwood Witter, Elizabeth and Uncifer Congleton, Ted and Carol Jenks, Harold McKelvy, Pearl Booth, Beatrice Stewart, William Muirhead, Elsie Kapanka, Harry Bowen and Eleanor Vandever, whose father was the Seattle prosecuting attorney. (Many Roads, pp. 21-22)

Very few families lived in the Burien area at the time. “It was very woodsy around the school. Wild huckleberries covered most of the land.” (Our Burien, p. 47)

As the Highline area attracted new residents, it quickly outgrew the first schoolhouse. In 1926 a new Lake Burien Elementary, facing 18th Avenue S.W., replaced the smaller building. Terra cotta sculptures over the school's entrances were installed at this time. Between 1890 and 1940, terra cotta was widely used by architects, especially on the West Coast. Today this is recognized as a historic art form, with many cities taking steps to identify and preserve structures containing molded ornamentation.

The Lake Burien sculptures consist of several pieces: a 551-pound, 3'-by-5' owl with outstretched wings, reading a book; two “fish gargoyles,” a globe with two candles and the word LIGHT above it, and a plaque with the words LAKE BURIEN SCHOOL 1926. (Parks, Arts and Recreation Council Proposal for the Lake Burien Memorial Arch, March 7, 1994)

The two-story school began with six classrooms. Within two years, four more rooms

were added to the school's north side as the student population continued to grow.

Children walked to Lake Burien Elementary from Burien, Three Tree Point, Seahurst and Hazel Valley, occasionally sighting cougars and other wild animals in the nearby woods. In 1929 students from Three Tree Point were the first to be "bussed" to the school in a Model-T truck equipped with side and rear curtains, although the ride apparently included the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

In 1930 Lake Burien Elementary added a gymnasium with one of the finest hardwood floors in the district. The gym also served as lunchroom, music room, classroom and PTA meeting hall. During the Depression the school cook served three kinds of soup daily, knowing that for some of the children, this would be their only meal.

In 1937, three more classrooms were added, as well as a lunchroom in 1938. In the 1940s, five portables sprouted on the campus as the student population boomed. On September 19, 1949, LIFE Magazine featured the entire student body of Lake Burien Elementary on its centerfold: the 380 students the school was designed to hold peeking out from its windows, with the remaining 457 standing on the lawn.

Freeman J. Mercer was principal of the school from 1924 until 1952. He first came to Seahurst by streetcar and his initial salary was \$166 a month. He was also a teacher for 17 of his 28 years at the school.

In 1914 Jack Stokes came to Seahurst from Seattle. His father owned Stokes Ice-Cream Company in Seattle as well as one of the city's first large restaurants. Stokes moved to Seahurst because he liked the country and the residential area. He bought from the Seahurst Land Company. (Mr. Cecil, developer.) Jack was two years old when they built their brick home. Mr. Stokes was a former bricklayer in Pennsylvania. He built one of the largest six-bedroom homes and the first brick house in Seahurst. It still stands at 14620 25th S.W.

Jack roamed the woods with the other neighborhood children: Jack Williamson and Donald and Delmar Fadden and Gene Fadden . . . other early old-timers. They combed the beaches, swam, made their own rafts and spent hours outdoors. They had the Sound and Lake Burien to swim in. There were only five houses on the lake in about 1920--Bill Dashley, Schoenings, Fred Dashley, and Jack and Tobias homes, so the boys swam in their birthday suits.

Jack has been on the same piece of property for 52 years. He remembers the two-story Lake Burien School had a large rock-- about 15 feet high and 18 feet across on the southwest corner of the school grounds. This rock was removed when the school was torn down and the new school was built. Jack Williams and Jack Stokes had horses that they rode to school and pastured them across from the school. (These two boys were about the only two that did this.) (Our Burien)

In the 1970s, needing to update the school's aging heating system, the District chose to consolidate three elementary schools into the empty Seahurst Junior High School building. Lake Burien School was closed in 1976; but later, through the efforts of Burien residents, it became the property of King County Parks. (In 1978 Seattle Regular Baptist

bought the Lake Burien Elementary School property from the District for \$181,000, operating its own school program there into the 1980s.)

By 1992 King County had purchased the property as a potential park site and was preparing to demolish the school building. Recognizing the artistic and historic value of the school entrance's cast ornaments, community activist Vivian Matthews (who "just happened to be there" when the old school building was being torn down) convinced the County to spare the sculptures, and obtained funding from the County to safely remove them. A quarter-ton owl, two fish grotesques, a world globe and the name plaque that had graced the school's entrance for 66 years were carefully removed from the building, loaded onto Bruce and Bernadette Jones's flatbed truck, stored at Kirk's Feed and the Highline School District's Maintenance Facility (where Al Schmidt kept a watchful eye over them), and eventually mounted on the arch which stands today in the park.

From the City of Burien's Parks-Arts-Recreation Council, January 12, 1994 "Owl Project" document:

In 1993, when the Lake Burien School was demolished, Vivien Matthews, a member of the Burien City Council, saved the owl and other sculptures from destruction. . . . In addition to the owl, the words 'Lake Burien School' were also saved, but had to be cut into 4 pieces to get them down. There were also two fish gargoyles and a square piece with a globe, two candles and the word LIGHT—all skillfully done in molded concrete in incredible detail. They were probably protected by many coats of paint over the years. The only damage sustained during the removal was a broken ear.

The Burien Parks-Arts-Recreation Council was formed in the fall of 1993 and assumed responsibility for deciding what to do with the sculptures. They proposed placing the sculptures in the Lake Burien School Park—a brand new park and the first for the new city. Roger Patton, Jr., who grew up on 149th Street and attended Lake Burien School, accepted the challenge to design a structure to hold the sculptures. He designed an arch that replicated the school's front entrance. Here the sculptures could be placed high off the ground as they once were over the front doors of the school.

Many community members, local organizations (such as the Burien Parks, Arts and Recreation Council and Friends of Burien Parks) and suppliers helped create "The Arch" at the Lake Burien School Park. Years earlier, past council member Vivian Matthews had saved from the wrecking ball the Terra Cotta frieze that had once adorned the main entrance to Lake Burien School. Friends of Burien Parks member Pam Harper took the lead on the project and enlisted the help of a local architect, builder, and a variety of suppliers. The Friends sold personalized bricks--some engraved with apples to identify teachers and principals--that are part of the plaza where today Burien's Concerts-in-the-Park series is held, and where the interpretive plaques help keep the history of the place alive. (Friends of Burien Parks website, and the inscription in the park plaza).

The arch took a year to design and build. An art conservator rebuilt the pieces, a dedication ceremony was held and trees were planted. (Jennifer James planted one in memory of her late husband, Ted Evans.) Apparently the park itself was not a "done deal," at least while King County owned the land. There was controversy about what to

do with the property: some wanted to put a retirement home there, others low-income housing. (Telephone interview with Pam Harper, August 9th, 2007)

Harper also noted that many of the Hawthorne trees bordering the park were there when the school was still standing. Also, a pair of cedar trees, which are still there, framed the main door of the school.

The Burien City Council negotiated the assumption of responsibility for Lake Burien Park with King County during 1994. The City took the lead in construction of Lake Burien Park which was completed that year. (A Review of Parks and Recreation Services in the City of Burien, Sue Barnes Blazak, 1994)